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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 004947

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [VE](#) [GOV](#)

SUBJECT: GOC REACTION TO ARREST OF COLOMBIANS IN VENEZUELA

REF: A. CARACAS 1646

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 653

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GOC has sought to calm passions following Venezuela's arrest of some 90 purported Colombian paramilitaries (Ref A). President Uribe called for a thorough investigation and welcomed the actions of neighboring countries to prevent illegal activities of Colombians abroad. A civil registry check of the detainees reveal many, maybe all, are in fact Colombians. Reports vary, however, regarding how many have criminal records. FM Barco met with President Chavez in Caracas on May 14 and announced that Chavez and President Uribe would meet in the near future. Pundits and prominent members of Congress insist the arrests are a fabrication on the part of the Chavez Administration. COLMIL contacts either don't know or aren't telling. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Uribe and senior GOC officials have responded calmly to Venezuela's arrest of purported Colombian paramilitaries in the last week, as they did after Venezuelan Army incursions into Colombia in January (Ref B). Uribe has called for a complete investigation and has reiterated the GOC's desire that neighboring countries arrest Colombians involved in illegal activities, in particular terrorism. FM Barco met with President Chavez and FM Perez in Caracas on May 14. In her press remarks, Barco stated that her impression was that President Chavez was now certain that the GOC was not involved in the incident. Colombian Army Commander General Martin Carreno, singled out by senior GOV officials for having had contacts with the alleged paramilitaries in Cucuta, Colombia (his hometown), in March, has denied the GOV's charges by noting that he was there to visit relatives. Prominent members of the Colombian Congress and leading pundits, however, have come out strongly against Venezuela on the detentions, arguing it is a political spectacle orchestrated by Chavez.

[1](#)3. (C) In conversations with MFA interlocutors on May 12, poloffs were advised that civil registry checks of the arrestees reveal they are in fact Colombians. FM Barco publicly stated that thus far only one detainee has a criminal record in Colombia. However, press reports, citing Department of Administrative Security (DAS, FBI equivalent) sources, state that 12 have criminal records. On May 13, the GOC requested fingerprints of those arrested and ordered the DAS to run checks. DAO officers, in conversations with senior COLMIL officials on May 14, were told that the GOC cannot confirm reports that one detainee is a military reservist. COLMIL tells us the detainees are from Cucuta.

WOOD